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## THE WALLACHIAN ROBBER.

THE valley through which the river Temes rolls its rapid waters serves as a road through the mountains from Lugos to Mehadia and Old-Orsova. Not far from the commencement of this valley lies the town of Karansebes. Farther up are the scattered farm-houses which form the village of Szlatina, and the traveller who goes against the strong current of the river sees on the left bank a small church which, situated on a rocky eminence, is visible a long way off. This little church is not particularly ancient. Its present form dates from the year 1771, and its origin does not go back more than about three centuries. But with this origin is connected a recollection which is dear to the hearts of the people, and, though scarcely a hundred and twenty years old, combines the poetical interest of an ancient tradition with the reality of an historical event. As all eyes are now turned towards this part of Europe, our readers will, we doubt not, be pleased to be made acquainted with the story, which is in substance as follows.

It was in the year 1738. Prince Eugene, the noble knight, lay wrapped in that dark, cold slumber, from which none awake till the judgment-day. The death of the old hero had inspired the sons of the prophet with courage. They now considered they had no longer any reason to fear the arms of Christendom. The expedition of 1737, which was at first successful, had been brought to an inglorious conclusion through the incapacity of Seckendorf Pasha. But of what avail was it that Seckendorf was now in prison, and that the timid Dorat Pasha had been beheaded? The Turks had, nevertheless, pressed forward as far as Mehadia, and the apostate Bon-neval was celebrating a new triumph.

In the neighbourhood of Karansebes lay an imperial army, in which were the two dukes of Lorraine, Francis and Charles, the sons of the liberator of Vienna. The elder of these two princes, afterwards known as the German emperor Francis the First, had been married in the year 1736 to the Archduchess Maria Theresa, daughter of Charles the Sixth.

The Turks were at Mehadia. This place, which is known to many on account of the medicinal springs in its neighbourhood, lies about six hours' journey above Orsova, in a narrow defile which extends sideways from the valley of the Danube. The position of the Turks was covered in the rear by the fortified town of New-Orsova. Their outposts had pushed forward up to the river, and their marauding parties went on the road to the upper part of the pass, which is called the key to Teregová and Szlatina. There skirmishes frequently took place with the imperial marauders, but only at a distance. Sabre and scimitar remained in the scabbard, and the shots came for the most part from such a distance that they appeared destined for no other purpose than to awaken the echoes of the woods, and thus give intimation of the prevalence of war in the land—a fact which otherwise there might have been some danger of forgetting.

On the flanks of both armies crowds of desperadoes collected from the surrounding mountains and woods, but they were at this time more anxious for their own security than eager in the pursuit of their usual vocation. The interruption of intercourse injured their calling, but they hoped for a full compensation for all their privations and dangers as soon as the armies had withdrawn. They had at this time powerful opponents in the Turkish soldiers, whose envy they awakened; while on the other hand, the imperialists treated them with all the severity of military vengeance. Whenever they caught an unlucky votary of St. Nicholas, they hung him upon the nearest tree, for the wild beasts of the wood to feast upon his flesh, and the birds to prey upon his head, shoulders, and breast.

The evening sun was shining upon such a poor sinner, who a few hours before had been thus summarily despatched. He was hanging upon the branch of an oak on the edge of the wood near the village Szlatina, clothed in a short shirt and loose linen trousers full of folds, which presented the appearance of a woman's dress. His weapons, his hat, and his upper garment had doubtless been carried off by those who had rendered these articles superfluous to him. In other respects the body was uninjured.

About a hundred paces off, a woman might be seen gazing at the unfortunate creature, peeping out of some thick bushes in which she was anxiously endeavouring to conceal herself. Her desire to avoid observation arose principally from a dread of the marauding

dragoons, who appeared here and there almost always in pairs, sometimes on horseback with their muskets across the saddle, and sometimes on foot with their weapon over the shoulder, and the bridle slung round their arm. The woman, though not very young—being rather more than thirty—was handsome and stately in appearance, with a good figure and large powerful frame indicative of robust health. A pair of bright grey eyes sparkled in her round chubby face. Her short neck, broad shoulders, and well-developed breast, were covered with clean white linen. From her slender waist a pretty sort of gown descended to her ankles, and her feet were encased in a pair of high boots, such as are elsewhere worn by men. A broad-brimmed man's hat overshadowed her brown face. Over her shoulders was thrown a gaudy-coloured coarse woollen cloth, which the Wallachians make use of as a cloak or bed-coverlet. In the scarf, which served as a girdle round her waist, were stuck a sabre and two horse-pistols. The Amazon carried in her hand a Janissary's gun, with long barrel and short stock, but provided with a French percussion lock.

From her hiding-place the armed woman kept anxiously looking round at the river, the wood, the mountain, and the dragoons in succession; but ever and anon she returned to gaze with still deeper attention upon the corpse that was dangling in the air. And when at last she began to move off, she muttered to herself, as she clenched her fist and held it up towards the troop in the valley:

"Maruschka will yet find means to avenge poor Dobru, her faithful messenger. Hadst thou not pity for his youth, thou execrable hangman? Scarcely twenty times had his bright eyes beheld the return of spring. His lip was covered with the first light down which betokened a manly heart. What can I say to his mother, when she asks me what I have done with her youngest and dearest son? I must reply that the Imperialists have murdered him out of mere wanton caprice and violence. He had done nothing to deserve such a fate. He had simply gone out in a friendly country to fetch me some powder and shot, which we cannot dispense with here. He carried armour and weapons, as became a brave man. A consciousness of his innocence alone could have thrown the wary and active youth sufficiently off his guard to be thus overtaken. He must have thoughtlessly gone and asked the hirelings for a pipe of tobacco. This is what I must tell his aged mother; yet before I have well finished the sad tale, I will add, 'Be comforted, afflicted mother: your Dobru is avenged.'"

Maruschka cast yet one more indescribably fierce glance at the hated foes, then shouldered her long gun, and bounded off nimbly and safely as a chamois through the gathering darkness of the night. It was pitch dark before she reached the cleft in the rock on the other side of the first hill, on descending which she heard a loud long whistle. A double whistle gave the expected answer. Maruschka hastened on her way, and soon reached the spot where she was expected. She found there a square-built man, who was enjoying a comfortable doze on a moss-covered stone, upon which he stretched himself out like a great bear.

"You have kept me waiting a long time," said he, gaping, "I had almost fallen asleep. But where is the young fellow?"

"He is not come yet," replied Maruschka, in a melancholy tone. "Ask me no more questions, Dschurdschu, you will learn all at the proper time."

The old man refrained from urging her any further, for he saw plainly enough by her manner of speaking that she had met with some mishap, and he had no wish to excite her temper, which was already not a little ruffled. He could not, however, help saying, after a while: "I suppose you will soon expect me to light the fire, and get you a comfortable bed ready. You must be tired and hungry after the toils of the day, I should think."

"Don't you know yet, that I am never tired," was Maruschka's reply. "We must only stay here long enough for me to eat a morsel of food and swallow a draught of something to slake my thirst. It is no use waiting any longer for Dobru. We must go up towards Mlakaberg as quickly as we can."

"You command, mistress, and I obey," muttered Dschurdschu, in a scarcely intelligible tone. Maruschka laughed heartily, and said: "You don't like to go to Mlakaberg then? you have not yet made up matters with the beautiful Wantscha. She has set your old heart all in a flame, and instead of soothing your pain, she takes delight in irritating it to the utmost of her ability."

"You are quite right in what you say, only you forget one thing. The lass will not give me her consent, it is true, although her parents are willing, yet she will not let me go free. As often as she sees me at a distance, she smiles at me, and when she comes up, she asks me how I do in a most winning, affectionate way, and keeps on flattering me, till at last all my displeasure changes into a perfect sunshine of delight. Yet, no sooner am I warmed with pleasurable emotion, than she suddenly becomes cold, and her smile of affection is exchanged for a bitter laugh of scorn. Hence, I am glad to get out of her way as quickly as I can."

"It is for that very reason," interrupted Maruschka, "that I take you to her."

"I don't understand you. What pleasure can it afford you to cause me pain?"

"I will put an end to your pain then. The old one must overcome the resistance of the young lass."

The rough fellow jumped up from his seat more astonished than delighted, great as his joy was. Unable to refrain from expressing his wonder in words, he said: "You don't like to see your folks married. It is a common saying with you, that whenever a fool is to be born, a young girl is married to an old man. Now I am not young, nor am I the greatest favourite with you. Whence, then, this sudden change of feeling towards me? Do you wish to get rid of me?"

"Your head is turned with delight," said Maruschka, smiling. "Just think, a little soberly if you can, for a moment, and you will need no answer from me. Don't you know why I dislike to see my people get married? Simply, because the first year after a robber has taken a wife, he loses all interest in his occupation. His thoughts are at home as often as he goes out, and if he is wanted for a long expedition, he is no use at all. But with you the case is very different. You are no longer young enough to be billing and cooing with your mate from morning to night."

"But what is wanting in youthfulness," interrupted Dschurdschu, "may, perhaps, be made up in ardour."

"Wantscha is a good lass," continued Maruschka, "as any in the neighbourhood. Besides, she is the only child, and will inherit the farm. Young, beautiful, prudent, and rich, is the bride you have in view. Already your heart longs for her, and yet you are afraid to take her. One scarcely knows what to think. Do you tremble at your unexpected good fortune?"

Dschurdschu reflected a while before he ventured to reply. "When the fox sees a hen lying with its legs tied, he is in no hurry to touch it. Easy prey is often only a bait. If I am to follow your advice, you must tell me plainly why you wish me to marry at once. You have some particular reason, and I must know it before I advance a single step."

"If you don't like Wantscha," said Maruschka, "you may remain single for what I care."

"I have only one more question to ask you," rejoined Dschurdschu. "Against whom is the blow directed?"

"You shall know that too, you old chatterbox," was the reply. "The blow is aimed at the man whom I call mine. I can't agree with him, I don't like him; he may bestow his heart upon whom he likes, but not in my domains. Let him keep within his own limits, as I do in mine. I am jealous, it is true, but not of Petru so much as of my territory. Mlakaberg lies in my dominions, the sources of the Temes are mine, Czerna and Motru are unquestionably my brooks. It was so settled when I withdrew with my companions from connexion with him. He may hunt where he likes, only not on my grounds."

Dschurdschu asked no further question. He had heard enough to understand that Maruschka was more jealous of her husband than she chose to admit in words. The imperious woman had separated from the harampashah, or robber-chief, because he neither would nor could submit to her overbearing conduct.

As the two wanderers descended quickly and silently into the valley which serves as a channel for the waters that spring from the south-west side of the hill, they came to a sudden stand. A glimmer of light shone upon them from the depth of the valley. The yellow spot of light seemed no larger than a lamp behind the window of a hut. But the travellers well knew that there was no human dwelling there; consequently the light must come from a fire in the open air.

"Who can it be," asked Dschurdschu, "that is encamped there? Surely it is not Petru's company."

"A company of gipsies, perhaps," replied Maruschka; "we shall soon see."

"Shall we go down to them?"

"As if we had any choice in the matter. We have no other means of crossing the water. Let us approach cautiously."

Maruschka felt in her girdle, to be quite sure her pistols were there ready for use. She took her gun, loaded it, and primed it. Her companion also prepared his weapons for immediate use. Thus armed for whatever exigency might occur, they cautiously went towards the fire.

This caution was, for once, needless. By the fire lay a single man, who was neither a gipsy nor one of Petru's company, but an able-bodied Turk, apparently about five-and-thirty years of age, in a small waistcoat and large trousers, with his hair cut close and his beard long. He was sitting cross-legged, after the Turkish fashion, on the ground near the fire, smoking his chibouk as comfortably as if he were seated in a tavern at the Golden Horn, where, even at the present day, the sons of the prophet are in the habit of drinking the dark waters of wisdom. Yet he was not so completely confident of peace as he would have felt in the coffee-house of a rognish Greek or a contemptible Armenian. He had his weapons pretty near him, not excepting even his gun, which was leaning against a stone close by. Near the gun lay a deer stretched out, a tender piece of which, rolled up in fat and put upon a spit to the fire, diffused a savoury smell around. The part which the brave Turk was cooking for his solitary meal was the liver. Among his companions he would not have ventured to eat this forbidden part. With his right hand he turned the spit, while he held his chibouk with the left. He seemed to be dreaming over the job, if not asleep; but he was still all on the alert. He heard the footsteps of the two who were approaching. In an instant he exchanged the spit and chibouk for his gun, and, nimble as a weasel, he darted into a bush close by, from which he could look out in concealment. But before he had time to see who it was that startled him, a clear voice said, "Fear nothing, Fortunatus; I am alone with old Dschurdschu." The voice sounded familiar to him, and the speaker went close to the fire, that the light falling upon her might remove all suspicion from his mind. "Come forth," said Dschurdschu, "if we had been disposed to do you any harm, you would have had a bullet in you before you were aware of us."

The Turk came out to greet the new-comers, and resume as quickly as possible his two-fold occupation. Directly he had lighted his chibouk and begun to turn the spit again, he said, "Welcome, friends of old times. I invite you to my meal. I am glad to see you once more. Above all, I beg you not to call me Fortunatus—a name I no longer bear—but Selim, in future."

Maruschka and her companion had taken their seats on moss-grown stones. The warlike woman took a short pipe from her girdle and filled it out of a leather pouch. After she had lighted it, she thus replied: "What I have heard several times without believing it, is true, then, after all? You have forsown the true faith of a Christian; you have denied the Saviour of your immortal soul, and changed your auspicious name for an ill-boding one."

"We won't quarrel about that, fair Maruschka," said he; "I think I have made a good exchange. The prophet's paradise is a happier place than your heaven."

"If one were only sure of it," rejoined Maruschka.

"Faith is better than knowledge," continued the Turk; "I believe in the glory Mahomet promises me as firmly as I formerly believed in heaven with its angels and saints. I am, therefore, delighted with bright visions of the future, while I thoroughly enjoy the present. What was I before? A miserable robber, under Petru's stern command. What am I now? A prosperous chief of fifty men, with the prospect of something still better."

"Yet you did wrong in running away," said Maruschka in a subdued tone; "had you remained, I might, perhaps, have preferred you to the present harampashah."

"If I had known that," replied Selim, "I might have invited you to go with me."

"Are you in earnest?" asked Maruschka, with strangely flashing eyes, whose glance the Turk could not face.

"Yesterday is past," said he, "and to-morrow is not yet come."